

Seattle Permits

— part of a multi-departmental City of Seattle series on getting a permit

Lot Coverage, Height and Yard Standards for Homes in Single Family Zones

Updated June 27, 2005

Seattle has three zones in which single family homes are the predominant type of development: SF 9600, SF 7200 and SF 5000. The abbreviation "SF" stands for Single Family, and the numbers following the abbreviation indicate the minimum lot area generally needed to build a home in that zone.¹ Other than the differing lot size requirements, Land Use Code standards that regulate the size and location of buildings are the same for all single family zones. Development in Residential Small Lot (RSL) zones is subject to different standards and is beyond the scope of this Client Assistance Memo (CAM).

New buildings and modifications to existing homes must conform to the lot coverage, height and yard standards described in the Land Use Code. Some examples of and exceptions to the requirements are presented here; however, you should also review the sections of the code that might apply to your project before preparing plans for a permit application. Code references are included in this CAM for convenience.

In addition to reading this pamphlet and the Land Use Code, you are welcome to discuss your project in person with a permit specialist or a land use planner at the DPD Applicant Services Center, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave. in downtown Seattle. **HOURS:** M/W/F, 7:30 am-5:30 pm; Tu/Th, 10:30 am-5:30 pm. **PHONE:** (206) 684-8850.

¹ Some existing lots are smaller than the minimum size, and the code allows creation of small lots under certain conditions - see Section 23.44.010 of the Land Use Code, which is found in Title 23 of the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC). The section references used in this bulletin all begin with the chapter number (23), followed by the section number (.44) and the subsection (.020).

LOT COVERAGE

Homes (principal structures) and associated structures (accessory structures) may cover 35% of the lot or 1,750 sq. ft. whichever is greater (23.44.010C).

This calculation is made on the footprint of all structures on the entire lot. You must include balconies, bay windows and architectural projections such as eaves and gutters that extend more than 18 inches even though they do not actually touch the ground.

Accessory structures and permitted portions of principal structures may cover no more than 40% of the required rear yard (23.44.016D1 & 23.44.014D6).

Lot Coverage Exceptions (23.44.010D)

If your side lot line abuts a dedicated street, or if any of your lot lines abut a dedicated alley, you may add half the area of the side street or alley to your total lot area up to a maximum of 25% of your lot area when computing lot coverage.

Certain structures are not counted in lot coverage. These include:

- Pedestrian access bridges that are 5 feet wide or less (uncovered and unenclosed).
- Barrier-free access ramps or other access for the disabled or elderly meeting Washington State Building Code Chapter 31.
- Decks or parts of decks which are not over 18 inches above the existing grade.
- Freestanding structures such as fences, bulkheads, freestanding walls but not arbors.
- Underground structures or the underground portion of a structure.
- The first 18 inches of eaves and gutters projecting from principal or accessory structures but not eaves associated with the roof of an arbor.
- Solar collectors meeting the provisions of 23.44.046 and swimming pools meeting the provisions of 23.44.044.

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Permit Application Requirements for Lot Coverage Calculations

As described in **CAM 103** and **103A**, you must calculate the lot coverage of existing and proposed development on your lot and show it on the plot plan that you are required to submit with your application. If you are not sure of the requirements, ask a permit specialist in the Applicant Services Center for help. Permit specialists are also available by phone, 1 p.m.-4:15 p.m., Monday-Friday, at (206) 684-8850.

HEIGHT

The base height of homes (principal structures) is 30 feet above existing grade or finished grade whichever is lower or the average height of the two abutting single family homes if one or both is higher than 30 feet (23.44.012).

On lots 30 feet or less in width, the base height is limited to 25 feet or the average of the two abutting single family houses on single family zoned lots, so long as the average does not exceed 30 feet. (Detailed measurement techniques are found in Chapter 23.86 of the Land Use Code).

Pitched Roofs

The ridge of a pitched roof on a principal structure may extend up to 5 feet above the base height limit as long as the pitch of the roof is at least 3 to 12 (See Fig. A).

No portion of a shed roof (ie. a roof with only one sloping plane) may extend beyond the base height limit.

Sloped Lots

Additional height is permitted for sloped lots at the rate of one foot for every 6% of slope that exists between the highest elevation wall and the lowest elevation wall (the downhill side of the structure). The additional height is added to the base height only on the downhill side of the structure (see Fig. B). Height for pitched roofs and exemptions are computed after the additional height for slope is added to the base height.

Exemptions for Rooftop Features

Under certain conditions, radio and television antennas and flagpoles are exempt from height limits.

Open rails, planters, skylights and clerestories may extend no higher than the ridge of a pitched roof or four feet above a flat roof.

Chimneys may extend four feet above the ridge of a pitched roof or above a flat roof.

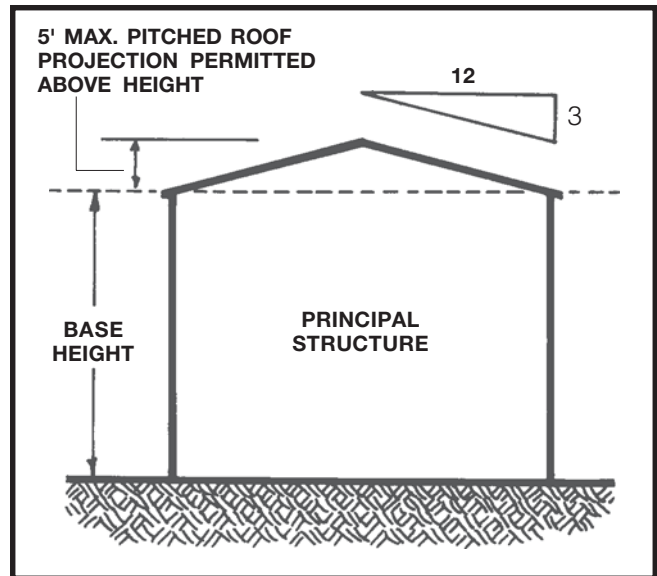


Figure A

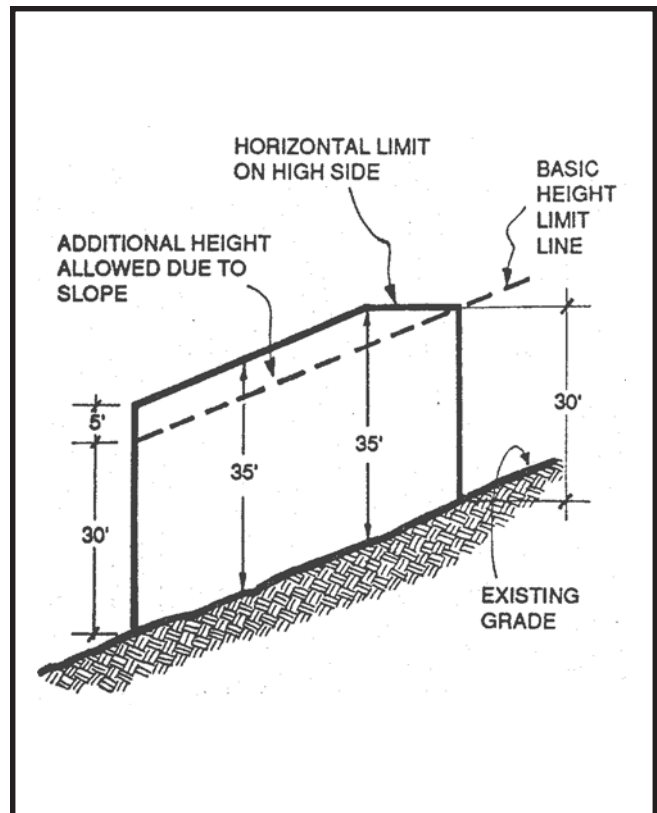


Figure B

Permit Application Requirements for Height Calculations

In general when the proposed structure is not within 2 feet of the base height limit: indicate the height in feet on elevation views of the structure as measured from the existing and finished grade.

When the proposed structure is at or within two feet of the base height limit, or a height bonus is used on a sloping lot: on a plot plan, show existing and finished grade, using 2-foot contour intervals. This information must be shown on a topographic survey showing two foot contours and prepared and signed by a state of Washington licensed surveyor.

When the height is determined by averaging adjacent single family structures: provide the elevation dimensions in elevation or plot plan views. This information is to be provided by a state of Washington licensed surveyor.

Elevation Views: As illustrated in Fig. C & D, building elevations are scaled drawings of the exterior of the building showing what it will look like when constructed. Show all elevations of the building. Indicate existing grade elevations at corners. Also show the elevations of all floor lines, top of wall, roof ridges and finished grade.

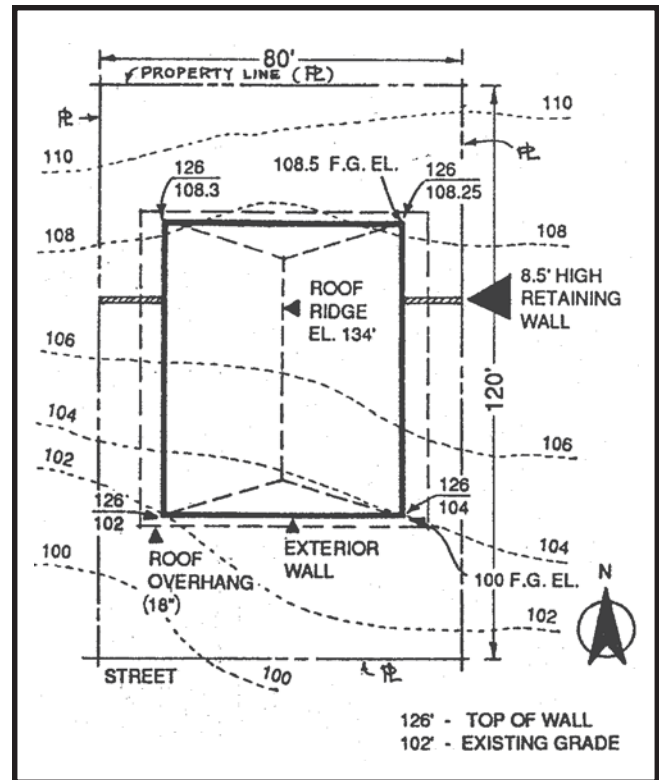


Figure C

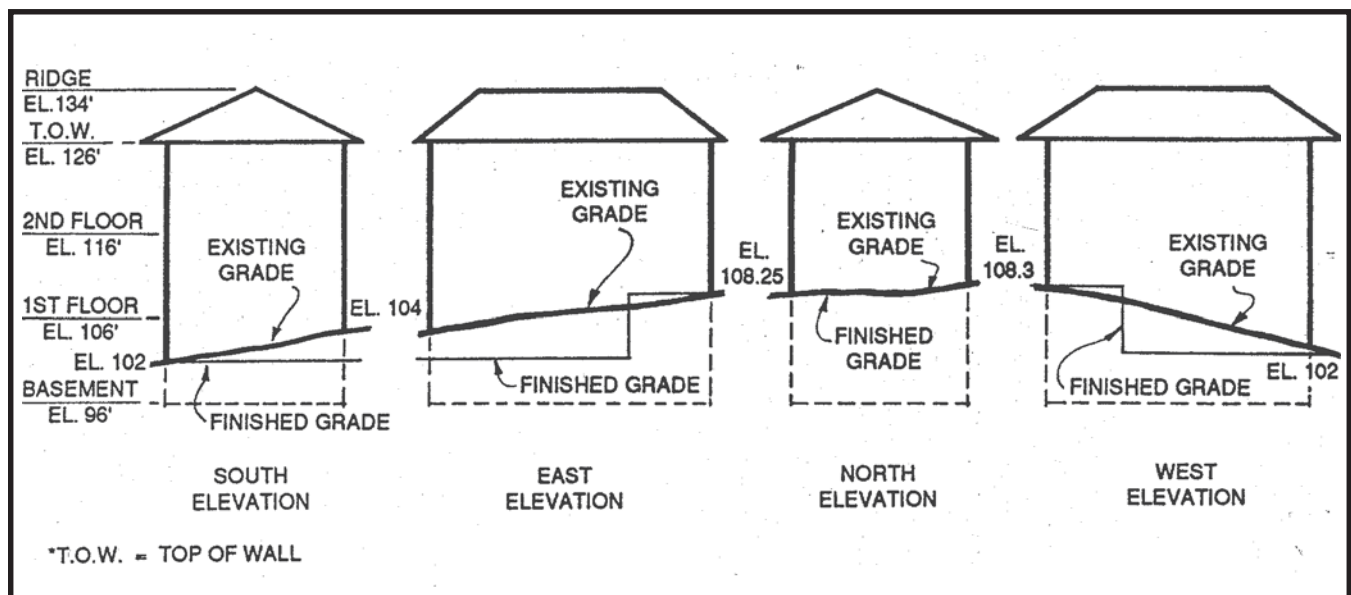


Figure D

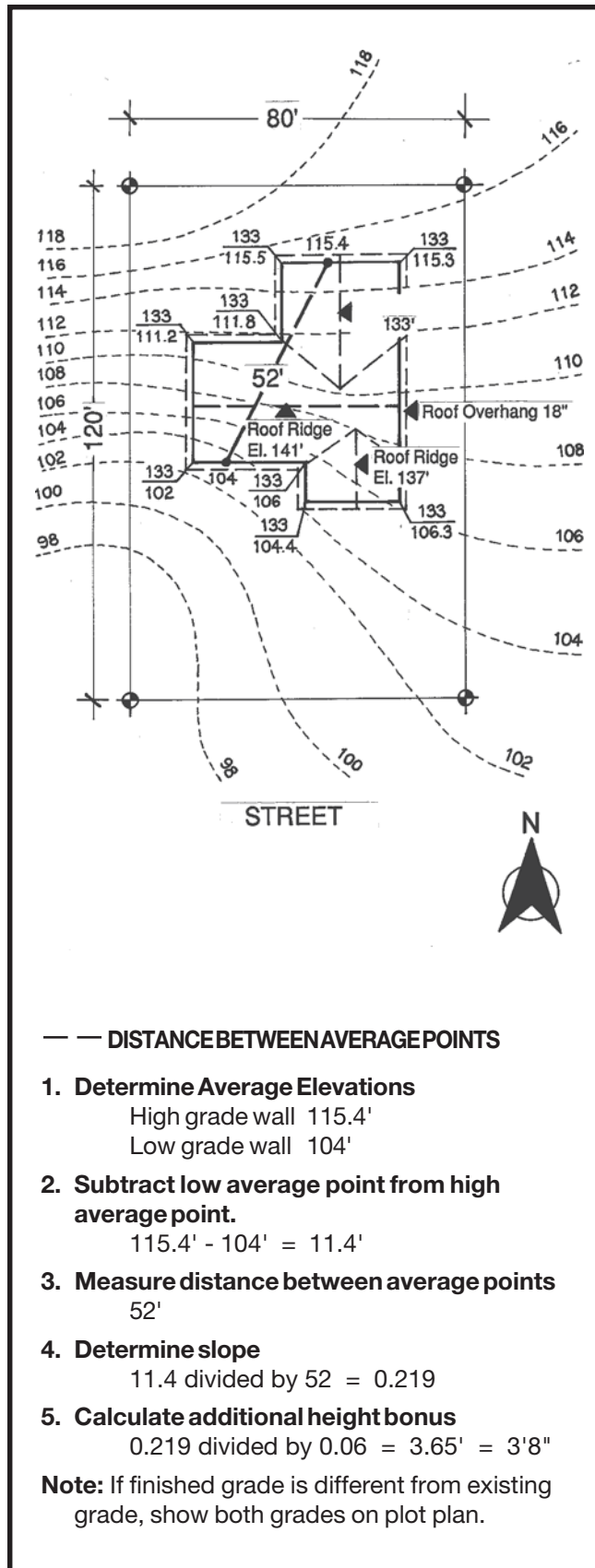


Figure E

Calculating a Height Bonus: Fig. E provides an example of height bonus calculation. Using existing grade:

- Determine the average elevation of the high grade wall.
- Locate this average point where it actually occurs on the wall, based upon existing grade.
- Determine the average elevation of the low grade wall.
- Locate this average point where it actually occurs on the wall, based upon existing grade
- Calculate the difference.
- Measure the distance between the average point on the high grade wall and the average point on the low grade wall.
- Divide the difference in elevation by the distance between the points.
- This will give you the slope on the lot.
- Divide by .06 (6 percent) to get the additional height allowed as a sloping lot bonus.
- Calculate to the nearest inch.

YARDS

Required Front Yard: 20 feet or the average of the front yards of the single family residence on either side of your lot, whichever is less.

Required Rear Yard: 25 feet, or 20 percent of lot depth (minimum of 10 feet) whichever is less.

Required Side Yard: 5 feet. 10 feet for street facing side yard of a reversed corner lot.

The Land Use Code requires that certain portions of your lot be set aside for front, rear and side yards. In general, no portion of your house may extend into these required yards. You may place accessory structures such as garages, sheds, decks, porches or arbors in these areas only if certain criteria are met. Exceptions from standard yard requirements are described in the following sections. Of course, you may provide more than the required minimum yard. Yards are measured from the property line in toward your structure. Property lines are not always obvious. Do not rely on physical features such as fences and sidewalks to indicate property lines. They may be on your neighbor's property or in the street right-of-way.

The basic yard requirements for single family zones are illustrated on Fig. F.

Additional requirements or exceptions may apply to a yard that borders an alley, is a corner lot, has an irregular shape, is a through lot (a lot with two street

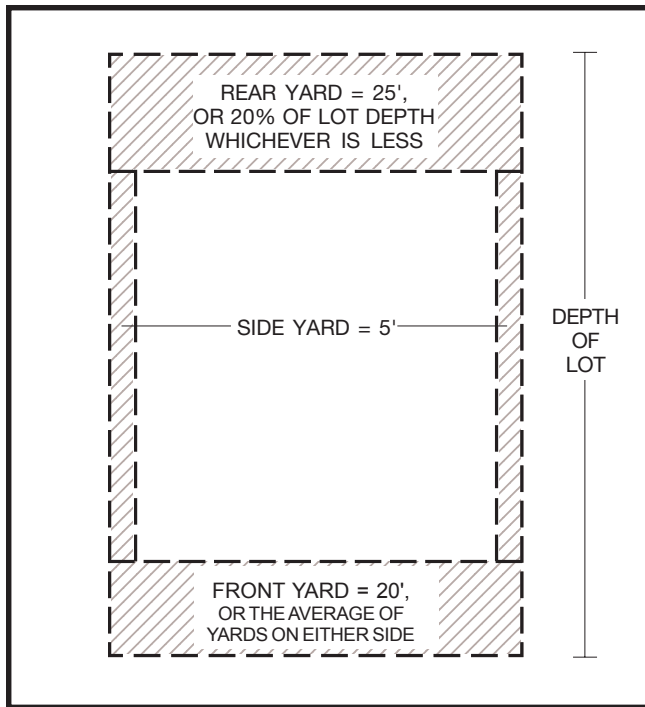


Figure F

frontages opposite of each other), or is on a sloping lot that is greater than 35%. Please check the Land Use Code or ask a Applicant Services Center staff member for help if you have one of these conditions on your lot.

Exceptions to Standard Yard Requirements

Additions to the principal structure in front, side and rear yards (when the structure is already built into that yard): If an existing structure is already “nonconforming” with respect to a required yard, and the nonconforming wall is at least 60% of the total width of the respective facade, then the existing wall line may be extended according to Sec. 23.44.014D3. Different conditions apply to front, side and rear yards.

The portion of an existing structure that is non-conforming with respect to front or rear yard setbacks can be increased, to a limited extent, in order to accommodate a habitable basement or attic, per Sec. 23.42.114A1.

Projections into front yard on lots 30 feet or less:

On lots 30 feet or less in width, projections up to 4 feet into the required front yard are allowed above 8 feet of facade height. A minimum 5 foot front yard must be provided (see Fig. G).

The chart on page 6 illustrates other possible exceptions that may be applicable to your lot. Please check the designated section of the Land Use Code for details.

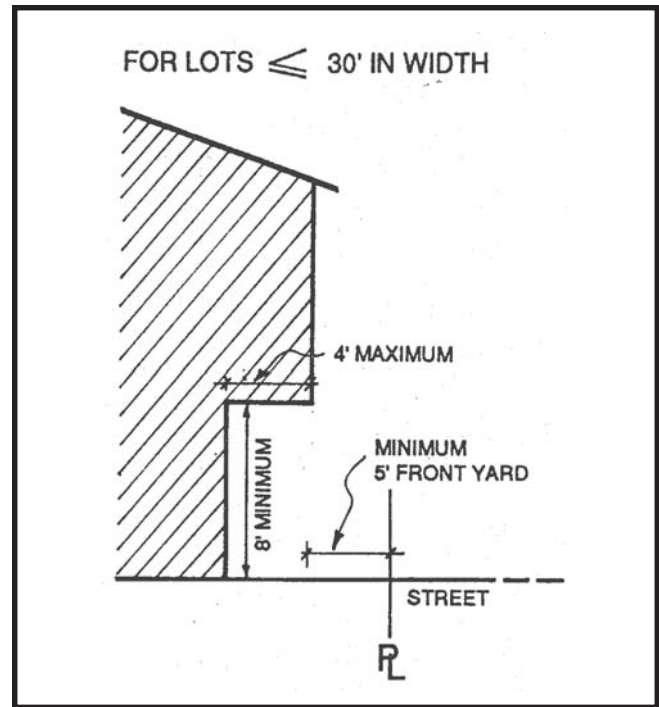


Figure G

Additional Information for Yard Requirements And Exceptions

In addition to the specific references described in the preceding table there may be additional requirements that are applicable to your project. Sections 23.44.016, 23.44.044 and 23.44.048 describe development standards for structures that are permitted as accessories to your home, such as garages, swimming pools and solar collectors.

Measurement techniques are presented in Sections 23.86.008 and 23.86.010 and definitions of technical zoning terms are found in Chapter 23.84.

In addition, you should consult the Seattle Building Code which also regulates construction close to the property line. Section 503.2 is designed to prevent fire from spreading across property lines; Section 1203 requires maintenance of minimum natural light and ventilation and Section 705 regulates the construction types of projections close to property lines.

Permit Application Requirements for Yard Calculations

Your basic plot plan will give the DPD staff most of the information it needs to check your plans for compliance with yard requirements. Provide front yard information (graphically show the dimensions on your plans) of adjacent properties if you are averaging to determine

your required front yard. If your lot is sloping, you may need to provide additional topographic information.

If you wish to take advantage of exceptions to yard requirements that require an agreement or easement, you must bring the agreement or easement with you.

Exception for:	Permitted in:	Features	Code Section
Non-conforming Principal structure	front or rear yard	May be extended in order to accommodate habitable basement or attic	23.42.114A1
Principal structure	Side yard	Zero lot line with side yard easement	23.44.014D2
Detached accessory structure	Side yard	Zero lot line with side yard agreement with neighbor	23.44.014D1
Detached garage	Side yard	Zero lot line in portion of side yard adjacent to rear yard	23.44.014D1
Uncovered porches no higher than 4 feet	Front, side or rear yards	Various provisions	23.44.014D4
Chimneys, cornices, columns, and eaves	Front, side or rear yards	May project no more than 18 inches	23.44.014D5a
Bay windows	Front, rear and street side yards	May project no more than 2 feet; limited to 8 feet in width	23.44.014D5b (see 5d)
Garden windows	Front, side or rear yards	Minimum of 30 inches above floor, 6 feet tall and 8 feet wide	23.44.014D5c (see 5d)
Attached garages, covered and unenclosed decks	Rear yard	Various provisions	23.44.014D6a
Garages, accessory structures	Rear yard	Maximum 40% lot coverage of rear yard.	23.44.014D6b, 23.44.016 and 23.44.040
Garages	Front yard	On a through lot	23.44.014D7
Terraced garages & open or otherwise enclosed parking	Yards abutting streets	Uphill or downhill yards	23.44.016C3 to C6
Pedestrian access bridges	Front, side or rear yards	5 feet in width, no less than 3 feet to the side lot line	23.44.014D8
Barrier-free access	Front, rear or side yards	Meeting WA State Building Code C31	23.44.014D9
Fences, free-standing structures, bulkheads	Front, side or rear yards	6 foot height with additional height with special conditions	23.44.014D10
Decks	Front, side or rear yards	No higher than 18 inches	23.44.014D11
Heat pumps	Front, side or rear yards	No closer than 3 feet to any lot line	23.44.014D12
Solar collectors	Front, side or rear yards	3 feet from side yard, 15 feet from rear yard and 6 feet into front	23.44.014D13 and 23.44.046
Critical areas	Front and rear yards	25% reduction, up to a maximum of 5 feet	23.44.014D14
Arbors	Front, side or rear yards	40 sq. feet coverage with maximum 8' height, 50% open	23.44.014D16a
Arbors	Yards abutting a street	30 sq. feet coverage over pedestrian walkway, then as above	23.44.014D16b

LEGAL DISCLAIMER: This Client Assistance Memo (CAM) should not be used as a substitute for codes and regulations. The applicant is responsible for compliance with all code and rule requirements, whether or not described in this CAM.